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Review

School reintegration of pediatric burn survivors: An integrative literature review[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Background: The school is an essential context for children's social interaction with peers and to develop academic skills. Therefore, a fast reintegration can help children with burns to normalize their life. Thus, school reintegration is an important outcome after burns. The aim of this review was to systematically synthesize the literature addressing school reintegration programs of pediatric burn survivors.

Methods: Five electronic databases were searched independently by two reviewers. The search yielded 13 eligible publications. A qualitative content analysis was conducted.

Results: The two themes identified centered around (1) the roles, obstacles, and support for the different stakeholders (i.e., the child, parents and teacher) and (2) the contents of the school reintegration programs in which subthemes such as purpose, planning, essential elements, team, and effect were distinguished. The results show that return to school should start as soon as the child is admitted to the hospital and the program should acknowledge the different stakeholders' needs and tailor the program to these needs.

Conclusion: The review emphasizes the necessity of an integrated school reintegration program empowering both the child, the parents and the teachers and tailored to the child's

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specific situation. Furthermore, it offers recommendations for further improvement of the field.

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1. Introduction

Burns are a public health problem around the world, with an estimated 265,000 deaths each year [1]. Most burns happen in low or medium-income countries, for example India [1] and Brazil [2], with about one million burns per year, about seven times more than in high-income countries [1]. Childhood burns represent high lethality rates and are the fifth most common cause of non-fatal injuries [1]. Thermal and scald burns are the most common type of injury in children [3,4]. Burns can deprive the child from normal activities such as school and interactions with peers. Therefore, efforts to assist the child in returning to common daily activities are important to facilitate reintegration after burns.

School plays a vital role in the socialization process of children and provides a context that helps to develop the child's identity, academic and social skills, and many other abilities [5]. Severe burns require hospitalization that may take up a period of weeks to months, interrupting school activities for a period of time or even completely abandon them [6]. The disruption of normal routines and being apart from family and classmates may be an additional stressor beyond the physical and psychological problems the children may have to cope with. Therefore, keeping contact and nurturing friendship with peers can be important for the recovery process, especially in adolescence [7].

After the period of hospitalization, the child will take up normal life while the process of scar maturation is ongoing. Scar maturation can take months to years before the final stage has been reached. A common complication of deep dermal wounds is the formation of hypertrophic scarring [8]. Hypertrophic scars are red, thickened, and hard resulting in movement limitations and disfiguring scars. In an attempt to suppress hypertrophic scarring, children need to wear pressure garments [9]. These ongoing changes in

appearance, that may be accompanied by stigmatization, may hamper school reintegration beyond the suffering from traumatic stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms and other challenges to quality of life [10-12]. It may be as scaring for the schoolmates and the teacher as for the child itself to meet each other and to adjust to these changes. This indicates the need to prepare peers, teachers and staff to the child's return.

When back at school, the child may be less able to participate in school activities such as sports and drawing as a result of functional loss in gross or fine motor skills. This can provoke feelings of frustration and irritability [13]. These negative experiences can deteriorate their motivation to return to school even further. Also on the longer term when they are reintegrated into society, the child can be faced with situations of stigmatization. Bullying is an example that concerns all stakeholders such as the pediatric burn survivors, parents, siblings, teachers and other members of the school community [14,15]. Therefore, a program that helps clarifying what happened during the period of hospitalization and how the scars will progress might prepare the school community to adjust to the situation, to increase awareness of what happened and possibly to facilitate a successful school reintegration.

In conclusion, burns can interrupt school activities during hospitalization and the physical and psychological consequences of a burn injury may constitute an obstacle to return to school. As attending school is a pivotal factor in a child's life, it is important to identify barriers that hinder the process of school reintegration and find ways to facilitate school re-entry. The objective of this study was to identify, summarize, and integrate current knowledge on school reintegration for pediatric burn survivors. The literature review may support clinical practice by assisting health professionals in developing and improving strategies to help the child as much as possible.

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